DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 376 119 SP 035 496

AUTHOR Schiller, Marjorie; Streitmatter, Janice
TITLE A Self-Study of Teaching Practices: Are We Practicing What We Preach?
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Action Research; Art Education; Educational Practices; Higher Education; *Journal Writing; Preservice Teacher Education; *Reflective Teaching; Secondary Education; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); Student Attitudes; *Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance; Student Journals; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Educators; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS Preservice Teachers

ABSTRACT

Teacher educators routinely encourage preservice students to be reflective while learning to teach through dialogue journal writing and supervisory discussions. Likewise, they encourage teachers in the field to engage in action research and analyze and reflect upon their teaching through critical self-study. This paper describes a study that took place in two distinct contexts in two research universities in different parts of the country. Two teacher education instructors share their experiences in a self-study of their teaching practices. Each instructor included dialogue journal writing in her classes to achieve ongoing knowledge of what was happening in the classroom from the perspective of both students and instructors. At the end of each class everyone in the class, including the instructor, spent 10 minutes writing in their journals, which were then exchanged and read. The teacher collected and read all the journals, commented on the entries, and returned them at the next class meeting. The journals were analyzed periodically to uncover recurrent themes. One theme that surfaced regularly was a positive response to nontraditional teaching methods and strategies. Most students in both classes appreciated the journaling process as did both instructors. Journal excerpts are included. (Contains 17 references.) (LL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 376 119

A Self-Study of Teaching Practices: Are We Practicing What We Preach?

Marjorie Schiller
Ohio State University

Janice Streitmatter
University of Arizona

A Presentation at the Annual AERA Conference
April, 1994, New Orleans

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M Schiller

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

SP035496

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Two university level teacher education instructors share their experiences in self-study of their teaching practices. Two contexts are studied, one in art education and the other secondary education. The methods include the use of dialogue journal writing with students to achieve an on-going knowledge of what is happening in the classroom from both student and instructor perspectives. Journals have been analyzed to uncover recurrent themes, and final evaluation of the journaling process as judged by both students and instructors.

A Self-Study of Teaching Practices: Are We Practicing What We Preach?

As we develop our preservice and graduate level teacher education classes it is important to reflect upon our own teaching practice as part of that process. We encourage our preservice students to be reflective while learning to teach and do this through dialogue journal writing and long supervisory discussions. We encourage teachers in the field to engage in action research and analyze and reflect upon their teaching using critical self-study. But who will encourage us, the university level educator, to be reflective about our own teaching? We believe that we will have to encourage each other.

Two of us have decided to actively encourage each other to be reflective about our own teaching. As part of our efforts, we tried several vehicles through which critical reflection might emerge. For the purpose of this study, we wrote in journals along with our students and invited them to dialogue with us concerning our teaching. We shared our frustrations and successes with each other, and invented ways that critical reflection has become an integral part of our teaching. We have become aware of how our open concerns regarding our own teaching affected our students in a positive way, in that they can better understand that learning about teaching is a continual process for teachers at all levels of experience.

We have been influenced by others' research in understanding the process of reflective teaching; those interested in defining ways that teachers engage in action research that examines teaching practice through self-study; and those who have included methods of journal or dialogue journal writing as a way to collect invaluable data.

Action Research and Reflective Teaching

The ideologies supporting both action research and reflective practice have influenced recent inquiry conducted by teachers in many settings. Action research in education is generally defined as teachers doing inquiry in their own classrooms to achieve understanding and improvement (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990). Classroom-based research is at times conducted collaboratively with sets of "critical friends", or peer teacher groups (Sagor, 1991) or between classroom teachers and university researchers (Oja & Smulan, 1989). Researchers in diverse disciplines (for example, in art education see May, 1993) have recommended action research as an appropriate method for teachers to use to understand and change their teaching. Journal writing has been suggested as a method to discover meaning in action research (Oberg, 1990).

Sub-categories of action research also have evolved, as in critical action research, described by Carson (1990) as inquiry for positive change, and socially critical action research (Tripp, 1990) that is defined as "strategic critical pedagogic action on the part of classroom teachers"

(p. 161). The notion of teachers taking the role of researcher as an addition to an already too heavy workload has been introduced as well (Glesne, 1991).

The term "reflective teaching" has received much attention and enjoyed popularity since The Reflective Practitioner was introduced by Schon in 1983. Conceptually, the ideas behind reflective teaching are really much older and can be traced to writings by Dewey in 1933 (Richardson, 1989). A myriad of techniques are suggested to encourage reflective process. They include yet are not limited to; including structuring experiences in a developmentally appropriate step process (Ross, 1989), the dialectic use of clinical supervision during student teaching (Roth, 1989), portfolio-inspired conversations with peer teachers (Richert, 1990), and dialogue journal writing (Roderick, 1986).

Tom (1992) expresses surprise at the wide popularity and interest in reflective teaching and suggests that the "intensified interest" may come from the fields' lack of faith in teacher effectiveness research that would uncover "prescribed skills and teacher behaviors for the professional curriculum" (p. Vii). There is much research that surfaces under the descriptor of reflective teaching, and much of it describes what university researchers are trying to encourage in others. As an example, Canning (1991) reports that teachers and student teachers encouraged to reflect about their teaching developed a keener sense of

who they were in the educational process and that they did in fact a have "a voice". Few researchers however, are writing about their personal quest of reflective teaching.

Some Recent Self-Study Stories

Several university level teachers, usually under the guise of action-research, have examined their role in the teaching process. Oberg (1990) has used journal writing as a tool to redefine her action research. What she began as a inquiry project for her preservice students became a journey for herself as well. In her words:

> Instead of presenting myself as one who would help them penetrate the surface of their daily professional activities, revealing hidden motivators that were unknown to any outsider without their collusion, I came as a co-inquirer. As they probed their practice, so I would probe mine. Side by side we faced the question, 'Who am I as educator ar this time in this place?'. (p. 217)

She admits discomfort with the role; not as self-studier, but as one leading others down an unknown path. As a way to structure the shared inquiry, Oberg asked her students and herself for "specific telling events", a concept that had shared conceptual understandings.

Lehman (1991), collaborated with her students as co-observers of classroom events within a university class setting. Her study sought to combine the methodologies of journal writing and collaborating with students to promote self-study of teaching practice at the university level and to better integrate theory into practice..

Our Story: Two Self-Studies of University Level Teaching

There were two distinct contexts in which this self-study took place. Although both instructors work in large research oriented universities, they are in different parts of the country. Marjorie is in the Midwest, Jan the Southwest. Marjorie was the teacher of a preservice art education class called "Art for Children With Special Needs". It was a new class and Marjorie felt that it would provide fertile territory for a self-study project as she was developing the course and as she was teaching it. There were ten undergraduate art education majors in the class. Jan's class was a preservice secondary education course entitled "Schooling in the U.S." that focused on social foundations of education. She had taught this particular course many times and there were 32 students in the class.

We each integrated a journal writing activity as part of our class structure. Logistically, we planned the last ten minutes of each class as a writing time for students and instructors alike. The students were asked to write about either the content taught during that class session, or about the methods we used in class that day. Our journal entires contained an analysis of the methods used for instruction as well as our understandings of how the students seemed to react to and understand the intent of class activities. The journals were then collected, read, and responded to by the instructor before the next class session. Students took turns reading and responding to the

instructors journal. During the latter half of the term there was a slight change in the journal trading system as each person in the class, instructor included, traded journals with a different class member. Part of the assigned work for the next session was to read and respond to the last journal entry of your partner.

The final journal entry carried an assignment unlike the open-ended nature of the others. We asked students for an evaluation or analysis of the journal writing experience. For the great majority of the students in both classes the journal keeping was something new. This was an additional means of gathering data about the journaling experience. We made copies of these particular entries from each student.

We had several anticipated goals of the journal writing activity. First, we were concerned about creating a climate in the class where all students felt that they were a part of each class session, even if that had not participated verbally during class. In other words, each student would feel that she or he had been heard by someone. Second, we were attempting to create an atmosphere of collaborative collegiality. We hoped that in addition to being heard, students would also feel that their journal entries would provide instant feedback to the instructor or someone else in class, and that this feedback was being taken seriously by the instructor. Third, we anticipated that the journals would provide a more immediate means to analyze our teaching than the more common end-of-term student evaluations.

Finally, we anticipated that the journals would provide us with the opportunity to evaluate journal writing in this specific self-study context.

While we returned the journals to the students at the end of the term, we kept data, or sample entries of many of the students. For example, in Jan's case, of the 32 students in class, she copied the entire journals of eleven students. Marjorie was able to copy all ten of her students' journals.

Themes from the Journals

The journals provided much raw data that we were able to begin to look at critically. We found that there were several interesting and recurring themes in these journals. One theme that surfaced regularly was positive response to non-traditional teaching methods and strategies that we used. Here are a few examples from Marjorie's group in art education:

> I really enjoyed the exercise that we did today with our case study. It was interesting to finally see how I can apply all this wonderful knowledge that we have been studying. It is one thing to read about children with disabilities in a textbook, but it's quite another to use that information in the real world.

This student is referring to an exercise in responding to a case study of an actual child, and how a art teacher might plan for her inclusion within the art room. A second student comments on a class debate.

> The debate we had in class today was good. It was challenging trying to come up with an argument against (the author of an article we read). I think it must be good to consider the ideas of those who oppose you. It helps to solidify your own beliefs.

Marjorie wondered about the debate in her own journal entry, and asked some questions of her partner:

> I'm not sure the debate worked as well as I had hoped it would- what do you think? Can you think of another format that might have been stronger?

The partner answered in this way:

> I thought the debate was a different approach and it kept me motivated because it was not an ordinary discussion. It really made me think about both sides of the issue... the debate was good practice for me. I think we should have more practice in this area rather than just reading and regurgitating back the material. In this situation, I do not think there is a better solution.

A third student reflected on a small group task of developing an interview to administer to teachers in the field.

> Developing questions for an interview was very helpful. It made me think of situations that I would encounter as a teacher. This would also be a great technique to use with my students. I could have them make an interview for an artist.

In this entry the student responded to a strategy that she liked and had gone the extra step to include it into her repertoire of teaching strategies for the future. This is what Marjorie had hoped that they all would do to some extent.

In Marjorie's journal she tried to explain why she used different methods and strategies in her teaching. She questions whether her intentions were understood by the students:

> I hope that I'm setting up this class to encourage people to actively construct their own knowledge and beliefs about special ed kids and art- I try not to lecture or dwell on recall from the readings- but set

> up situations where people are thinking about issues & ways to solve school-based problems- I hope this is coming across to everyone.....

Marjorie was answered positively by her student partner-of-the-week:

> You are a success! It is nice to have a class where the teacher is not lecturing the entire time. Your classroom strategies seem to generate a lot of discussion....I'm constructing my own knowledge and beliefs about special ed children. I didn't realize it until you mentioned it...

Student Responses to Journal Writing

The responses from students in the secondary educational foundations course to the journal writing activity as a whole indicated that we had achieved our goals for the most part. Overwhelmingly, the students felt the journal writing experience was very positive in a general sense. However there were three who had reservations about it. Some of their comments were these:

> A journal connotes personal writing and is not something that should be read by another person. We should be allowed some privacy as to what exactly was written.

> It was not always good. Sometimes I tend to have rather conservative viewpoints and sometimes I would trade with an unconservative person and it wasn't the way they wrote it, but I would feel pretty bad about my viewpoint, so I don't know if it's always good.

But other students in both settings spoke positively for the most part and indicated the following in regard to the first two goals we had set for the dialogue journaling process, although we had not formally discussed our goals in class.

Regarding our first goal, to have students feel an integral part of class:

> (from secondary Education) I really thought the journal was a great idea- not only did it foster a lot of personal interaction with other students- the type of conversations I had were of high quality in addressing the material. The journal provides a forum for those who don't get to speak as much and insures that many views are heard. More importantly, it creates a rapport with others- even those with whom we disagree. As we deal with the issues, we become aware of the need to challenge our own thinking and the thinking of others.

And another from secondary education:

> I feel it (journal writing) was a very good idea because it accomplished 3 things. First it helped to impress the issues discussed in lecture a little more permanently in the ol' brain by actually organizing our thoughts in the topic and writing them down. That kind of expression to a thought will make it last a lot longer. Secondly it gave us a chance to express our feelings over one issue, that perhaps didn't get expressed in class. Then lastly, it was fun to both comment and receive comments from other classmates and find out what they were thinking.

Our second goal, to create a collaborative atmosphere, was reflected in several of the journals. This goal was addressed by our distinct feeling that the students felt as though we were treating them as colleagues in the learning process. Here are a few isolated comments from students in art education:

> You are the first teacher that I've had at (a large university) that has treated me as a young adult- a human being- all others are so distant from the students. Thanks.

And this from a student happy to be in charge of her own learning:

> The idea for us to present in class on different adaptations is a great way for me to organize and begin to think about "when I'm the teacher". I

> really appreciate all the material that is presented -we can share and pool our knowledge.

Discussion: Goals Three and Four- Our Own Analysis

Goal three, that we would use the feedback afforded by the journals to analyze our teaching on a more immediate basis is reflected in the following e-mail (another form of journaling) message from Marjorie to Jan. It was sent around mid-term of the self-study project:

> Boy, my students are really not shy about evaluating class. It seems that at first they were fairly polite, but now having seen how I sometimes criticize my own teaching, I think they feel a bit safer to make suggestions. One student wrote that he thought our topic was interesting today, but that class "dragged". I wrote him back and agreed. I couldn't put my finger on what really went wrong- I kind of had the "blahs" and admitted that to the student- I also commented that I didn't think a teacher could always be "on"- in any setting and asked what he thought of that. I'm going to discuss our written conversation (with his permission) with the whole class and challenge them to stop class whenever it seems "draggy" and we'll talk about what is happening.

It was easy to use and respond to the suggestions and concerns of students on an on-going basis. The whole process set up the feeling of mutual respect and easy give and take.

Regarding goal four, the overall evaluation of the journal writing activity as a self-study process, each of us has her own conclusion to draw, although they are similar and positive in nature.

Jan

With regard to receiving feedback about my teaching methods as well as students feelings about the climate in the class, I found that the journal entries provided, as one

might guess, a wide range of views. There is one point that I can say applied to all students; each was deeply engaged, deeply enraged, or otherwise passionate about at least one of the topics/class sessions. Another interesting point I discovered as time went on, was that students tended to write about the teaching methods of the class in the beginning of the term, but later on nearly all were writing fairly vehemently about issues, wanting to make their points heard, if only on paper.

With regard to climate, there were two students who were extremely uncomfortable with the discussive climate of the class. As they came to see me regularly during office hours, I did not need their journals to confirm this. One of the students remarked, "I am not used to classes where I have to talk, or where I have to think. I just want you to tell us what we need to know." Increasingly these students withdrew in class, and in their journals as well. They clearly felt unheard, and unvalued in class, both by peers and me.

As a means of analyzing my teaching, I found the journal writing activity helpful to some extent. I was able to receive feedback almost immediately from students about how they felt the class session had gone. In some cases I believe that the feedback was valid, while in other cases I confess, I totally disregarded it.

I found the real value in the activity was for the students to develop a sense that they had increased the

power of their voices. When we began trading journals students would position themselves toward the front of the room at the end of writing time, so that they could be the one to trade their journal with me. They clearly wanted to be heard by "the teacher". But not long after, students began to look for particular partners with whom they had had discussions during class to trade with. Sometimes these pairs would be two people confirming each others ideas. But just as often, it appeared that the pairs represented two very differing points of view, and each wanted to have a chance to say just a little bit more on behalf of her or his perspective on an issue.

I have not spoken about the dynamics of the class, which were unique in my experience. There were 33 of us, and often passions would flair to such an extent that the individuals would stand up and talk over another in an effort to be heard. Given the personalities, the interests, and the backgrounds of the individuals in the class, I am not surprised that they supported the journal writing activity so strongly. The test will be in how the next group reacts.

Marjorie

My summative thoughts about our journal writing self-study project is that it was a success on several levels. No one really lost in the process and everyone had something to gain. I definitely saw a change in my students from the beginning of the course to the end and one that I do not

think can be explained away by just getting to know each other. I was sure that there was an increased level of confidence in my students. I asked them to help me evaluate the class on an on-going basis and they reacted by taking the task seriously and in some ways rising to the occasion. It appeared that they came in as students expecting to be taught by the teacher and came away believing that they were capable of controlling their own learning environment to some extent. They took an active and observable interest in the task of evaluating me, the course and everything in between.

I learned a lot from the exchange of journals. At first I was reluctant to give up reading all of them every week (but I only had ten and Jan had over 30). The act of giving up that right was an important part of making the classroom more collegial. I did not get to pass judgement on everyone anymore, we were all passing judgement on each other.

I also learned from the content of the journals. For example, one day I showed some video tapes of teachers interacting with their classrooms of children with special needs. I was having a hard time judging the reaction of the students which appeared somewhat cool; a usually very talkative class, they were strangely silent. I thought that it had probably been a mistake to change so drastically from the small group format we usually moved around in. I apologized for boring anyone one toward the end of class,

explaining that I knew all of the players in those tapes and that I found watching them fascinating. We then wrote in our journals, me berating myself for boring everyone. My partner-of-the-week explained the unusual quiet to me. She said that they had been studying and discussing children with special needs **in theory** and it was very moving to see them in actual classrooms and benefit from the little anecdotes that I could share, as I knew most of them well. They were not bored, rather speechless at the reality of the situation, also knowing that they to would be out in the field the following week to "see the real thing". I never would have considered showing those video tapes again had I not read that entry.

I also found that after a while I did not have to remind the students that it was writing time. They seemed to really enjoy the small amount of time we had set aside for reflection. I even found that some of them began to "cheat" and write little notes to themselves during other class activities so they would remember specific things to write about.

I loved the journals, although, at least once or twice I cursed them for their time commitment. It felt so good to write, read and respond to others and have them respond to me. It felt like I was modeling how to be a reflective teacher not just teaching about how it was a good thing to be.

Conclusion

We hope that more studies will be focused on university level teacher practice, particularly those of us in education, and more specifically in teacher education, should be the ones to lead the way in self-study of teaching. Practicing what we preach expresses a certain sincerity that we do belive in what we encourage others to engage in.

References

Carson, T. (1990). What kind of knowing is critical action research? Theory Into Practice, 24(3), 168-173.

Canning, C. (1991). What teachers say about reflection. Educational Leadership, 48(6), 18-21.

Glesne, C. (1991). Yet another role? The teacher as researcher. Action in Teacher Education, 13(1), 7-13.

Lehman, B. (1991). Practicing what we preach: A personal perspective on "knowing and doing" in university teacher education classes. Action in Teacher Education, 13(1), 22-27.

May, W. (1993). "Teachers as researchers" or action research: What is it and what good is it for art education? Studies in Art Education, 34(2), 114-126.

McCutcheon, G. & Jung, B. (1990). Alternative perspectives on action research. Theory Into Practice, 24(3), 144-151.

Oberg, A. (1990). Methods and meanings in action research: The action research journal. Theory Into Practice, 24(3), 214-220.

Oja, S. & Smulan, L. (1989). Collaborative action research. A developmental approach. Falmer Press.

Richardson, V. (1989). The evolution of reflective teaching and teacher education. In R. Clift, W.R. Huston & M. Pugach, (Eds.), Encouraging reflective practice: An examination of issues and exemplars. New York: Teachers College Press

Richert, A. (1990). Teaching teachers to reflect: A consideration of programme structure. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 22(6), 509-527.

Roderick, J. (1986). Dialogue writing: Context for reflecting on self as teacher and researcher

Ross, D. (1989). First steps in developing a reflective approach. Journal of Teacher Education, 40(2), 22-30.

Roth, R. (1989). Preparing the reflective practitioner: Transforming the apprentice through the dialectic. Journal of Teacher Education, 40(2), 31-35.

Sagor, R. (1991). What project learn reveals about collaborative action research. Educational Leadership, 48(6), 6-10.

Schon, D. (1983). The reflective practitioner. New York: Basic Books.

Tom, A. (1992). Foreword. In L. Valli (Ed.), Reflective Teacher Education (p. Vii-X). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Tripp, D. (1991). Socially critical action research. Theory Into Practice, 24(3), 158-166.